

(The following is not a verbatim transcript of comments or discussion that occurred during the meeting, but rather a summarization intended for general informational purposes. All motions and votes are the official records).

SPECIAL FINANCE COMMITTEE – APRIL 13, 2024
(BUDGET HEARINGS)

A special meeting of the Finance Committee was held on Saturday, April 13, 2024 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, Rhode Island.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:40 A.M. by the Chair.

II. ROLL CALL

Present Councilman Robert J. Ferri
 Councilman Richard D. Campopiano
 Councilman Christopher G. Paplauskas
 Councilman Daniel Wall
 Council Vice-President Lammis J. Vargas, Vice-Chair
 Councilman John P. Donegan, Chair
 Council President Jessica M. Marino

Also Present: Councilwoman Nicole Renzulli
 Thomas Zidelis, Finance Director
 Christopher Millea, City Solicitor (left meeting at 12:40)
 Stephen Marsella, Assistant City Solicitor (appeared at 12:40 pm)
 Stephen Angell, City Council Legal Counsel
 David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst
 Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Expenses

Ed Garcia, Director, appeared to speak and introduced the new Chair of the Library Board of Trustees, Michael Goldberg, who is also present. Director Garcia thanked the City Council for the continued support to the Library passing Resolution supporting State Aid to Libraries. He stated that line items reductions in their budget compiled with a continued rise in fixed costs without additional funding will likely result in some very tough decisions by the Board of Trustees and a reduction in services to the public. There are some inconsistencies in the salary schedule in this budget for three Library staff members. They all add to approximately \$8,000 combined added to the salary and FICA lines to have correct contractual salaries for these employees. He asked that the Council consider adding those funds in the budget during the amendment process.

Council President Marino addressed the \$8,000 salary adjustment and asked if that is an increase or if that is something that has already been budgeted in previous years. Director Garcia stated that a few employees had inconsistent information in the system that some is staff increase that are contractual that were not listed correctly in the City system. Council President Marino stated that, in terms of the reduction shown in this budget, she asked how part-time hours is going to impact the department particularly with the State requiring a minimum wage increase. Director Garcia stated that in FY22, the Library received an increase in part-time line item to account for a \$13 and \$14 minimum wage increase that were happening over the next two years. This year, in January, they have the \$15 minimum wage. In their original budget proposal, they had proposed level-funding that line item at \$450,000, but that is 32 employees they have to pay at \$15. With the reduction of the \$50,000 in that line item that is in this budget, that would be really difficult to meet those obligations without significant cuts elsewhere in the budget. It would be hard to say what reductions in services would have to be made. Everything is on the table.

Councilman Ferri asked Director Garcia to estimate what he feels he is being underfunded for the programs he is running. Director Garcia stated that if they were able to get the line item reductions that were taken from this budget, he thinks they could continue with the services they have.

Council President Marino stated that it has been presented to the Council and it seems logical, utility expenses have increased dramatically. With them having increased dramatically, why is it that in this budget they are still tracking at the proposed expenditure level going forward? Is it a fixed cost? Director Zidelis stated that this is one of the departments which will be receiving net metering credits reducing their electricity bills. It commenced February. Council President Marino asked what the net metering credits are per month. Director Zidelis stated that he does not have that information with him, but he will provide that to the Council President.

Councilman Wall stated that “Operations Library” went down \$55,000 from the budget that preceded this one. He asked for explanation regarding this. Director Garcia stated that that line item has been fairly consistent. Major expenditures from that line are Ocean State Library Fees, which have been increasing every year. This year they are trending to increase by approximately \$1,300. The Central Library Security Officer is in there as well. Some of these lines over the last few years are not typical trends before the Pandemic because they had to move money around. That is the main reason why trends look so different.

Councilman Campopiano asked if the traffic the library has on Sundays is seasonal and if there is any historical data. Director Garcia stated that historically, typically, the time between October and before Christmas vacation for students is really busy and then the Spring in May it picks up again. It is a large demographic and not just students lately.

PUBLIC WORKS; HIGHWAY, BUILDING MAINTENANCE, ENGINEERING, FLEET MAINTENANCE, BUREAU OF TRAFFIC SAFETY, REFUSE, CARE OF TREES

Chair stated that he would like to take groups #1300, 1301, 1302, 1303, 1304, 1305, 1306 and 1307 first.

Justin Mateus, Acting Public Works Director appeared to speak and stated that this budget was derived from looking at trends from 2023 and first half of this year, 2024. A few line items have special increases and he can address those.

Chair indicated to line item #51100 Group #1300 “Salary Schedule” and stated that this is going down approximately \$98,000. He asked if that means that the position of Director is not being funded. Director Zidelis stated that the Director position is partially funded. It is not anticipated to be filled July 1st, it is not being filled until the latter part of next Fiscal Year. Chair indicated to the proposed change in Differential and stated that he assumes it is to compensate for that vacancy? Director Zidelis stated, yes, that is correct.

Chair indicated to line item #54000 “Lighting of Streets” and questioned reduction. Director Zidelis stated that the reduction is for last payment on street lights and now we own them. Chair stated that the 2024 budget was \$1,700,000, the budget as proposed, is reduced by \$620,000. He asked how that number was derived. Acting Director Mateus stated that that number was derived by the fact that we paid a fixed fee per street light monthly as well as the maintenance needed on street lights. That number was derived looking at the first six months of Fiscal Year 2024 and expending that over a year. Looking at past bills from July through December of 2023 and carrying that over through Fiscal Year 2025. Chair asked if there is additional cost that no longer are picked up by the utility due to ownership. Director Zidelis stated that we carry the costs of repairing the lights before and after. Cost of repair is built in the budget.

Chair indicated to line item #54002 “Rodent Control Program” and stated that there is a reduction of \$10,000 and actuals through February this year is running approximately \$8,500. He asked if that reduction is just due to use. Director Zidelis stated, yes, it is. Through March, Rodent Control expenditures year to date were \$12,400. The \$25,000 is more than what we are expending now. Chair stated that he has experienced challenges in accessing the Rodent Control program for constituents particularly the ones who rent because the way the City does it, it has to be the homeowner or the property owner to sign off. For tenants, it could be difficult at times or there could be a barrier to getting the property owner to sign off even if it is a free program. If there was a way to change the process to make it easier for people that do not own the property, but live there to access the program, it might be a better usage. Acting Director Mateus stated that the reason the property owner needs to sign off on it, is the City is indemnified when going onto their property. That indemnification form needs to be signed by the property owner. That is the reason that is in place right now. Chair asked if Legal could look into this and if we could just explore it, it would be appreciated.

Councilman Wall stated that Acting Director Mateus is stating that when annualized, Rodent Control, right now is on track. He asked Director Zidelis if that is correct. Director Zidelis stated that through March, Rodent Control has expended \$12,460, which is 35% of this year’s \$35,000. As the Budget was being developed, if they just annualized just that \$12,000, it would have been less than the \$25,000 we are using, so realizing the importance of the program, the \$25,000 is above what would be a straight line projection. Councilman Wall stated that he is going to assume we are going to see more need for this service as we get into the warmer months. Director Zidelis stated that that is why they increased it above a straight line projection.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked how many bait boxes we have placed around the City and what the cost is for them. Acting Director Mateus stated that he does not have that information at this time. Council Vice-President Vargas asked if there is any type of communication costs that comes from this line item and what are we doing to advocate or make people aware about the Rodent Control Program? Acting Director Mateus stated that a majority of our advertising is via the City website, which does not have any expenses for that. Council Vice-President Vargas stated that the City website really does not have much information. She asked if there are any plans at all to get the word out because she thinks the rodent issue is a City-wide problem and to see that decrease in the number, where now we are being told it also includes communication as part of that and not in the other line item, is really bizarre to her. She would like to know what the cost is to the City for the bait boxes, how many we have and if there is any way to query that in terms of by Ward, if possible. Acting Director Mateus stated that the boxes that are placed are all mapped on GIS.

Councilman Ferri stated that it is upsetting that we are not budgeting full salary for a Public Works Director when 99% of the calls he receives from people involve things that involve Public Works. He asked what the wait is for someone right now if they have a bait box in their yard and how often does it get filled? Acting Director Mateus stated that that is upon request of the property owner. Councilman Ferri stated that he sees that as a problem because he has three boxes in his yard. He calls in approximately every two months to get them filled and every time he calls they are empty. He has people that have them in their yard and they tell him that the guy never comes to fill them up again. He tells them they have to call and some tell him they did not know they had to call and some tell him the next time they were filled is approximately one year ago. If the poison is not out there to kill the rats, then they are not going to die. Are we not doing a good enough job of getting back to filling them up or informing the people that they have to tell us that they have to fill them up because if his are empty after two months and people have them out for six months to a year, if the poison is not out there, the rats are not dying. That is part of the problem why the rats are still around and maybe that is why there are so many. This needs to be looked at and maybe we need to budget more money for bait so we can fill them more often.

Councilman Ferri stated that approximately four months ago, at a Public Works meeting, he had an item on the agenda regarding trees being trimmed and how much of a problem it was and we were getting lots of calls and the wait was 8, 10, 12 weeks and we were only addressing the trees that were dangerous to people and he asked Acting Director Mateus what we needed to do to solve that problem and he stated at that time that we needed to spend more money trimming trees. He does not see an increase in the tree trimming budget on this budget at all. That is still a problem. We have increased sidewalks. He asked Acting Director Mateus if he sees any of these things as a problem as the Acting Director. Acting Director Mateus stated that as to the trees, of course more money means more work getting done and there is certainly work out there that needs to be done. He agrees. Relating to sidewalks to the trees is a bit difficult and he does have a plan in place for that, that is more in the Capital side of the budget. The way we work on trees right now, to be fiscally responsible, is we go out for a monthly list using the State Master Plan Agreement and we send our list of trees to a handful of vendors and award that project based on the lowest quote.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked how many cellphones are under Public Works. Acting Director Mateus stated that he does not have that number at this time. Council Vice-President Vargas asked if Acting Director Mateus can send that information through an email and along with how much per line or per device the City is paying and number of cellphones throughout the entire City.

Group #1301 Division of Traffic Safety

Council Vice-President Vargas questioned the decrease of Extra Vacation after ten years in the proposed budget and asked if that is someone retiring. Director Zidelis stated that this is just one employee and that is extra vacation after ten years of service. He would have to check into this as to the number.

Group #1302 Division of Highway

Chair indicated to line item #54201 "Snow Removal Equipment Repair" and stated that it is level-funded at \$75,000. 2024, when annualized through February, it was running at \$31,000, the average over five years was \$52,000 and it is budgeted at \$75,000. There is a significant gap of what it has been, what it has historically been and what it is budgeted at. Director Zidelis stated that through March, including encumbrances, they were at \$63,000. It was a relatively light winter, but that is one of the items that was not reduced.

Chair indicated to line item #54202 “Snow Removal Materials” and stated that actual through February was running at \$156,700. Director Zidelis stated that this line item, including encumbrances, actual expenditures were \$255,000.

Council Vice-President Vargas stated that there are currently eight vacancies in that department. She asked if they are included in the salary schedule for 2025 and are they scheduled in FY2025? Director Zidelis stated that the \$2 million for salary is for all funded positions. There are eight positions with no funding in this budget. Council Vice-President Vargas stated that if we are not filling these positions and Overtime is going down, how will that impact the department and City services? Director Zidelis stated that those positions were not funded and we have no new positions that were not funded in FY24 and FY25 throughout the City with the exception of Police and Fire. Council Vice-President Vargas questioned if the decrease in Longevity is due to retirements. Director Zidelis stated that he is assuming it is. Right now, the figure for longevity is predicated on the employee base who gets longevity and a calculation of those employees in group #1302 as of the date he pulled the extract, so this is a payroll calculation function. The calculation for FY25 budget is predicated on five individuals receiving longevity.

Group #1303 Division of Engineering

No discussion was held.

Group #1304 Division of Building Maintenance

Chair indicated to line item #52008 “Electricity” and questioned the reduction by \$120,000 for proposed FY25. Director Zidelis stated that the March report year to date spent for electricity is \$212,000. We are seeing a trend going down and also there may be meter credits in some of these and they could be the cause of the reduction. Chair asked when these credits came online. Director Zidelis stated that they all came together in February.

Chair indicated to line item #54401 “Electrical Supplies” and stated that historical average is \$39,000 and it is at \$50,000 for FY25 and running at \$26,000 for this year. Director Zidelis stated that he cannot recall why the request was for increase. There was a reason why this line item was increased, but he cannot recall.

Council President Marino asked if Building Maintenance in this department cover the expense for repairs in the Fire Department or are they separate? She also addressed the vacant positions in this department and questioned the cost advantage of having those positions filled and keeping up with our buildings as opposed to outsourcing those types of repairs. Director Zidelis stated that as to the approach to improvements to the buildings, in this current year’s Capital Budget, FY24, Council authorized \$250,000 worth of building improvements. The improvements that are currently under way with the Fire Department, are being conducted under that overarching blanket of \$250,000. In addition to the Fire Department work, some limited work at the Police Station is being done with that \$250,000. We have also done improvements in the Clerk’s Office and a few others being done this Fiscal Year. To the request of utilizing outsource contractors, there is certain work that, to his understanding, is beyond the scope of the capabilities of our employees in Building Maintenance. As to the question whether a cost analysis has been done on how we should proceed with buildings, no cost benefit analysis has been done.

Councilman Campopiano asked if the City has an assessment of all the buildings or is it strictly reactionary? Acting Director Mateus stated that there is no assessment of City-wide buildings.

Councilwoman Renzulli questioned what “Legal Services Fund” is for. Director Zidelis stated that this is contractual obligation. Councilwoman Renzulli asked if the Council has a right to know what attorney it is and how much they are getting paid. Director Zidelis stated that of the two contracts that he has not read to date, it is the two contracts which we will be soon negotiating with. He can obtain this calculation for the Council, but it is per specific individual, \$104 for each person on the payroll. Councilwoman Renzulli stated that the Council receives a legal report from the Law Department every month, which includes information of Solicitors who are used outside, who they are, how much they cost per hour. She would like to see that for every Legal Services Fund, not just particular to this Fund. This information should include every department who is using outside legal work outside the scope of our Legal. Solicitor Millea stated that the Legal Services Fund, he believes, is almost an insurance policy for employees should they get in trouble, they can hire attorneys separate and apart from the Solicitors Office of the Law Department. Councilwoman Renzulli stated that she would also like to see who we are paying and how much they are getting paid per hour of any other department where it is not exclusively a benefit to Union employees.

Group #1305 Care of Trees

Councilman Ferri stated that we need to do a better job with trees and we are not allocating more money to it and this is disappointing.

Councilman Campopiano asked if this is outsourced. Acting Director Mateus stated that the Tree Warden does not do the work to maintain the trees. He is under the Engineering salary schedule. Councilman Campopiano addressed the replacement of trees and asked if thought is given into a different species of trees that may not be as destructive as the ones that have been put in in the past. Acting Director Mateus stated that they have looked at different species of trees. They are looking at doing some different studies throughout the City to optimize where to put certain trees. That is something they are working on right now.

Group #1306 Refuse Removal and Disposal

Chair indicated to line items #54600 and #54602 and questioned the rationale for increases. Director Zidelis stated that the amount that is depicted in the Budget is the contractual amount for our contract with Waste Management. One issue he does not know is the timing of where we are with the payments in the March schedule, but the City has a fixed contract with Waste Management and those are the amounts depicted in the budget.

Mr. DiMaio asked if the City pays RI Recovery. Director Zidelis stated, no we do not. Mr. DiMaio asked if we pay our tipping fees directly to Waste Management. Director Zidelis stated yes. Mr. DiMaio stated that tipping fees are usually predicated at the reduced rate to cities and towns from the State. Based on that, it was his understanding that we would be paying the fees directly to RI Resource Recovery. As Director Zidelis stated, we are paying Waste Management directly. He asked if we struck a deal to use their transfer station in Cranston instead of sending the Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) directly to the landfill. He thought as a City, we were obligated to use the State agency, so he would like some clarification. Director Zidelis stated that the calculation includes the reduced fee. In their contract it was a calculated fixed fee based on tonnage we are dumping. This is in the Waste Management fixed fee contract. Mr. DiMaio asked if that fixed fee includes roll off MSW and CND (Construction and Demolition Debris). Director Zidelis stated that he is not sure, but he will provide that for Mr. DiMaio. Mr. DiMaio asked if he could be provided with copies of invoices paid monthly for contractual hauling and the disposal cost. Director Zidelis stated yes.

Councilman Paplauskas indicated to line item #54607 “White Goods Amnesty Program” and stated that last year it was budgeted at \$50,000 and actuals are running under. In the actuals, does that include the most recent amnesty program in the bulky waste pickup or is that not calculated yet? Director Zidelis stated that he does not believe that is included. This is as of March. Councilman Paplauskas stated that he is just curious if \$50,000 is going to be enough.

Group #1307 Fleet Maintenance

Chair asked Acting Director Mateus if he is anticipating purchasing any big items for FY25. Acting Director Mateus stated that through the Operating Budget, no, but there are proposed vehicles to be purchased on the Capital Budget side.

Groups #1300 (Public Works), #1302 (Highway), #1303 (Engineering), #1305 (Trees), #1306 (Refuse and Removal) & #1307 (Fleet Maintenance)

Revenue

Chair indicated to line items #1302 “Division of Highway Maintenance and Highway Miscellaneous” and asked what the annualization is for that through March. Director Zidelis stated that the actual revenue received is \$160,000. Chair stated that it is running at \$213,000 for this year. He asked if there is no indication that we might see higher than anticipated revenue in that same line item for the subsequent year. Director Zidelis stated that we are over revenue in this category by approximately \$10,000 as of March. He would prefer, if he could go back to see what materialized from April through June of last year, but a straight line would be \$213,000. Chair stated that if there is money there, he would like to make sure we account for it.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked what the “Street Opening Permit” revenues under group #1300 is. Acting Director Mateus stated that this is for road opening permits. Anytime a contractor wants to excavate in the public right of way, they have to take out a permit to do that work. Council Vice-President Vargas indicated to group #1303 “Engineering Inspection Fees” of \$5,000 and questioned why it is so low in terms of what we are expecting as a revenue. Director Zidelis stated that year to date, this year, we are at \$4,900, FY25 budget is at approximately \$5,000. The FY25 estimate is more in line than what we are actually seeing for trending FY24. Council Vice-President Vargas asked if there is a reason why it is so low since \$30,000 was used in 2024. Director Zidelis stated that he has to check and see what the origin of the \$30,000 was because one of the things we had last year was DPW revenues were being deposited into the wrong account which skewed our numbers and our projections last year. They have corrected that this year and he is more comfortable with the \$5,000 for FY25 estimate based on what we are seeing.

LAW DEPARTMENT

Solicitor Millea appeared to speak.

Chair indicated to “Outside Legal Services” and stated that through February, the trend was looking over budget. He questioned why and if there are any particular cases or contracts causing that. Solicitor Millea stated that there was one outside expense of a case that the City had been involved with under the prior Administration which the City withdrew from participating in that lawsuit and upon removing ourselves from the lawsuit, there was a final bill that was submitted and paid out and that was in excess of \$30,000. There are 2½ months left in the Fiscal Year, but he is confident that he can keep it as close to what was budgeted last year.

Council President Marino asked Solicitor Millea what the number of Solicitors is under his management and will that change in the next Fiscal Year? Solicitor Millea stated himself and five other individuals on an inside Solicitors budget and everything else that Solicitors cannot handle is contracted on the outside.

BUILDING INSPECTIONS

Expenses

David Rodio, Director, appeared to speak.

Chair indicated to line item #52810 “American Disability Act” and stated that through February, it was trending well under budget, but proposal is to increase it by \$5,000. He questioned why. Director Zidelis stated that it should wash out in both revenues and expense. It has no net effect on the budget. It is neutral.

Councilman Ferri asked Director Rodio if he is understaffed right now. Director Rodio stated that they are getting by with the staff they have. The volume of work has slowed down quite a bit with the construction industry and as of now, they are good.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked if having two vacancies is impacting any of the work that the Inspections Department does on a day to day operations for the City. Director Rodio stated that if they get behind, they have part-time inspectors to come in per diem to do inspections. Council Vice-President Vargas asked if that was the case in FY24 where they used part-time help. Director Zidelis stated that in terms of accessing part-time help, this year’s budget, 2024, and next year’s budget, they did not actually budget an appropriation for part-time help. In terms of this Fiscal Year, the Director was allowed to access \$5,000 worth of backfilling positions and he has expended approximately \$5,400 this Fiscal Year. Next year’s budget we do not have an appropriation for part-time help similar to 2024. If need be, the Director will be permitted to get an outside part-time vendor of inspector to come in to do the work. Council Vice-President Vargas asked Director Rodio if he foresees needing part-time help next year. Director Rodio stated that there would be some need to fill in that spot when staff takes vacations. Council Vice-President Vargas asked Director Rodio if he requested to the Administration some additional dollars for that part-time help. Director Rodio stated that he does not recall. Director Zidelis stated that in FY23, part-time help was for \$1,700 for the entire Fiscal Year, this year was \$5,400 through March and Fiscal Year 2025 there was no request and Administration did not fund it.

Councilwoman Renzulli questioned why Overtime is going down. Director Rodio stated that that is used for Zoning Board meetings. Some of the Overtime is related to the Fire Department emergency calls that inspectors are called to. Councilwoman Renzulli stated that approximately \$6,000 has been spent through March in the current year and that includes going to the Zoning Board meetings. We at least know Zoning Boards are consistent and we know there are going to be some after hours issues so with \$1,500, she would like to know how much it cost to go to a Zoning Board meeting to make sure we are at least covering that because that is something we can estimate. Director Zidelis stated that we can calculate that. He does not have it on hand right now, but we did reduce Overtime in this budget.

Revenue – Group #1111

Chair indicated to line item #42176 “Solar Permits” and asked how this is calculated. Director Rodio stated that that is calculated by dollar value of the permits. Chair asked why it is going down for next Fiscal Year. Director Zidelis stated the Inflation Reduction Act and this Fiscal Year through March, we are at \$145,000, which is approximately a little less than 50% of the \$275,000. If you annualize that, it is lower than the projection. He thinks it is going to be higher than the 912s because of the Inflation Reduction Act and all the incentives that they are throwing at green energy.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked what software is being used to track any type of Code Enforcement and penalties or housing permits. Director Rodio stated that they have software, opengov, that they pay annual fee that all permits are tracked. Council Vice-President Vargas asked where this is budgeted. Director Zidelis stated that it is not specific line item software, but he believes it is out of departmental expenses and believes it is \$177,000 a year for our subscription. Council Vice-President Vargas asked how long this software has been in place. Director Rodio stated that he believes it is five years. Council Vice-President Vargas asked if there is any backlog on any permit requests that are coming in. Director Rodio stated that inspection is made usually the next day or two days, at the most.

Chair called for a recess at 12:06 pm until 12:35 pm.

The meeting reconvened at 12:40 pm.

Chair asked for any public comment on any docketed items. No one appeared to speak.

PARKS AND RECREATION Group #1400

Expenses

Raymond Tessaglia, Director, appeared to speak.

Chair indicated to line item #55002 “Maintenance of Trees Shrubs” and stated that nothing has been expended in 2021, 2022 and 2023. He asked if there was an administrative change where the money for that or maintenance of trees and shrubs are being paid out of a different line item. Director Tessaglia stated that he believes they are paid out of 06 or 07. He uses that just for emergencies. Anything that they can handle on the bike path or in people’s yards. They started to use that again recently. Chair asked if it has been used at all this year. Director Tessaglia stated that it was not, but he believes they started using it again.

Council President Marino addressed “Maintenance and Upkeep of Parks” and asked Director Tessaglia, when trimming of bushes or cutting of grass, is this done by this department, how much of that is being outsourced and where are those expenditures identified in the budget? Director Tessaglia stated that they are trying to do as much work as they can on the parks, unfortunately, sometimes cleanups are required and the best and easiest way to do it is to have someone go in and do it. The cost is approximately \$500 with a Foreman and two Laborers to do a park, playground or school, which is hard to do during the day when kids are there, so on Saturdays, they bring in a group that do it for basically the same price or less. Council President Marino asked if any of the staff are doing tree cutting. Director Tessaglia stated that if they are able to, they will. Certain machines they do not have to get certain limbs and branches. Council President Marino asked what percentage is done inhouse and what percentage of the overall cutting and cleaning is done outside. Director Tessaglia stated that a lot of the tree cutting is being done, over 50%, inhouse and the department does work on the bike path when they are able. They also do all the baseball fields and soccer fields. School playgrounds, his department also services. They occasionally use outside vendors to go in on weekends if his staff can’t. Council President Marino asked where in the budget is the expenditures? Director Zidelis stated that for something such as trees on the bike path, it would be under that line item, otherwise, he would have to defer to the Director. He also stated that “Outside Contractors” would primarily be for shrubs and trees, which has not been spent. Council President Marino questioned if the line item that states -0- is where it would be used. Director Zidelis stated yes. Council President Marino stated that she has a problem with that because she knows for a fact that vendors have been used to do those things. Director Tessaglia stated that he did state that they use vendors. He would have to check the dates when vendors are being used. Council President Marino asked that this information be provided and Director Zidelis is to follow-up.

Councilman Ferri stated that there are at least one complaint a week from his constituents about the bike path or playgrounds and Bain track and it seems to be that the trend is that we are always reacting to these calls to either straighten things out or clean things up or empty garbage or whatever and they are not being proactive to try and prevent them from happening again and it is just a continuous thing. We need to have some kind of a plan to do a better job. He sees no increases anywhere that would help Director Tessaglia do his job better. He knows a lot of people that work for this department and he knows that some of them work really hard and they just can't seem to keep up with what they are doing because they do not have enough help or have enough equipment. He asked Director Tessaglia if he feels that this budget helps him do a better job to satisfy the constituents of this City that have been complaining to all the Council Members on a continual basis year round. Director Tessaglia stated that he would not say it does, but they are here to try to work and work with what they have. He would love to have more to spend. Councilman Ferri stated that he does not think this budget gives this department any chance to make improvements nor fill any vacancies they have. He asked Director Tessaglia if he requested to have these positions filled. Director Tessaglia stated yes. He is trying to get two young guys to take equipment operators positions. Director Zidelis stated that recent retiree's position is funded in this budget.

Council Vice-President Vargas indicated to "Recreation Expenses" and questioned the increase. Director Tessaglia stated that prices have increased as well as everything else they buy so he felt an increase was justified.

Councilman Ferri indicated to "Other Pool" and asked where that is in the expenses and amount. Director Tessaglia stated that Recreation Expense #65507. If it is a five-day week, \$8,600 for six week program, three-day week, \$5,900 for six week program.

Chair stated that he would like the following information from Director Tessaglia: price per camp for Summer of 2023 per person versus 2024 and also estimate of attendees for 2023 versus 2024.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Ernest Tommasiello, Director, appeared to speak and stated that this year's budget is pretty straight forward based on Grant that they get from HUD as well as carryovers from previous years as well as programming. They are regulated by HUD so their budget comes together very easily. There are certain categories that have maximums. That is why when they do this, whatever the Grant is and they have not received the final number yet so the numbers you see in the budget are an estimate. Basically, 20% of whatever the Grant is goes towards Program Administration and the balance of it has to go to the low to moderate income projects throughout the City depending on the location. He indicated that they are a public service and they have a housing program, they have public facilities that they fund. Some of the public facilities they give Grants to are Hope Alzheimer's Center and Senior Services receives some money from them as well as CCAP. They have a heating assistance program that they administer through CDBG Department itself. Most of these facilities are in Cranston, but some may be outside the City of Cranston, but the funds can only be used for Cranston residents that are utilizing those facilities. As far as the housing program, they have a rehabilitation program where if a homeowner meets the HUD guidelines for income, they could be eligible for either a 2% or a 0% loan. They also do a lot with tot parks. They are paying for the Smith St. playground and they also have just completed upgrades at Calise Field as well as Florida Ave. and they have exhausted the last of their COVID funding. As far as Citywide projects, they are also restricted there. They have, according to mapping, there are areas that they can do street paving and things like that.

Chair indicated that the number projected for 2025 budget, the projected federal award is down \$200,000. He questioned if that is just a change in census data at the municipal level. Director Tommasiello stated yes, if you look at the award, that also includes carryover from previous years.

Councilman Paplauskas stated that this department is doing a great job. He has received calls from residents that this Office has helped and the Office has been phenomenal.

SENIOR SERVICES

Group #1600 Senior Services and Administration

Expenses

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

No discussion was held.

Revenues

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

Chair stated that based on numbers he was looking at for last month, this line item is running under. Director Craddock stated that most of the revenue generated from the Senior Center and these categories is coming from Grants and it is a timing issue because they have to get to that point and then file and it is months later before they actually see the money so it is more of a timing issue projecting that we should be back on track by the end of the year.

Group #1601 Programs

Expenses

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

Council Vice-President Vargas stated that the proposed amount is \$56,570 and questioned why Hospitalization went down. Director Craddock stated that he believes that is because we are self-insured that is probably inflated because of the person that was working in that position was out for an extended period of time. Director Zidelis stated that FY24 that would have been the plan for the previous incumbent. What is before the Committee is the \$10,596 is the actual plan, a single plan for the current employee.

Revenues

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

Council Vice-President Vargas asked what the service Programs is. Director Craddock stated that that would be membership and programs that are charged a nominal fee for certain membership or programs. Council Vice-President Vargas asked if membership fees are being increased. Director Craddock stated that they are being increased a little bit, and they are starting to see more revenue coming in so this is the reason they are being increased.

Group #1602 Adult Day Care

Expenses

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

Chair questioned part-time help running way down. Director Craddock stated that part-time help has been a challenge. They are trying to find part-time CNAs and RNs and that is a challenge so right now they are using hired services for one of their CNA position because they can't find part-time CNA and he thinks they are going to continue doing that into next year. Chair asked Director Craddock if he continues doing that into next year, does he foresee a cost saving? Director Craddock stated that he would hope so, but what he does not want to do is leave himself short in that critical area.

Expenses

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

Chair indicated to line item #57701 "Nutrition Program" and stated that nothing has been spent through this year. He asked Director Craddock if he anticipates expenses coming up in the next few months. Director Craddock stated that that basically funds the holiday meal programs so they will get transferred over to the Nutrition Center. It just has not happened yet.

Revenues

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

Chair questioned why line item #46120 is going up 1000%. Director Craddock stated that this was kind of offset because looking at the Admin, they receive a designated Grant and 3D Grant from the State. They allocated the money where it appropriately belongs. Total overall revenues are down, but there is two specific reasons for that.

Group #1604 Senior Services Transvan

Expenses

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

Chair indicated to line item #51302 and questioned decrease of approximately \$41,000 for Hospitalization. Director Craddock stated that he thinks that that was related to the fact that they hired two drivers this year and there was also one increase in Hospitalization buyback, so now they have a full compliment, four full drivers plus the Supervisor.

Revenues

No discussion.

Group #1605 Senior Services Nutrition

Expenses

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

Chair indicated to line item #51200 “Part-Time Help” and asked what the change is due to. Director Craddock stated that it is more related to, as everyone recalls, last year they eliminated themselves as caterers, so when they put the budget together for this year, they had very little data to work with. Since they put in the budget in March, they did not actually eliminate that program until January, this was kind of their best estimate and now they are sort of refining it based on having significantly more data. He thinks the \$55,000 is accurate for what they are actually using the teams for now.

Chair indicated to line item #57701 and stated that the budget is staying the same. He asked Director Craddock if with the phasing out of that program, does he think that expenditure is going to remain the same? Director Craddock stated that he thinks it will remain the same.

Council President Marino indicated to line item #51100 “Salary Schedule” and stated that proposed budget states \$169,555, but when she goes to the actual salaried positions, even including the zeroed out for the vacant positions, it is actually a different number, it is over \$100,000 more? Director Zidelis stated that that is because of the benefits. Council President Marino questioned Director Craddock if he is not looking to fill the vacant positions. Director Craddock stated yes. Council President Marino stated that it is her understanding that the reason those vacant positions are not being filled is because of the kitchen services and food services have changed dramatically. She asked if that is correct and if we no longer supply other cities and towns. Director Craddock stated that that is correct. He stated that pre COVID, they were doing 5,000 meals a week and after COVID they are doing 2,500 now. They are down dramatically. Council President Marino asked if the Chef position that is filled is sufficient to satisfy the needs within the Senior Services Department. Director Craddock stated that that is correct.

Revenues

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

No discussion was held.

Group #1606 RSVP Program

Expenses

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

No discussion was held.

Stephen Craddock, Director, appeared to speak.

Chair questioned revenue running slightly under. Director Craddock stated that it is same as a timing issue. It is a Federal Grant that they utilize through Americare. It is just a matter of when the reports go in and when the money comes back in, but it is basically a guaranteed \$75,000.

Director Craddock stated that they are trying to expand their programs. They are now doing a trip a week through Transvan. They are seeing increases in the number of their programs and they are starting to look at doing more evening programs.

CANVASSING

Expenses

Nick Lima, Registrar, appeared to speak and stated that if you look at the current Operating Budget for this Fiscal Year, it is really not comparable to what they are doing in the Fall Elections and that is because they are not doing one, but two special Elections and three total Elections, so the balances are all off this year and is not very informative for looking at trends for next year. This budget was built off the previous Presidential Election, which was held in the FY21 in 2020. We have four City-wide Elections this year, which is unprecedented. It is five Elections in 13 months, 11 total Elections since June of 2020, which is also unprecedented for his office. Currently, they have 60,237 registered voters, 39,000 of which will likely vote in this Fall's Presidential Election. This budget requests \$225,000 for the Fall of 2024 Election and they are doing more with less because in 2020 they spent approximately \$300,000 for the Presidential Election that was possibly due to COVID, however, they have made significant improvements since then including Election law changes that have saved the City funds by lobbying the General Assembly and efficiencies gained from redistricting when total polling places were reduced from 30-26. That year, we also received \$125,000 in Grants, however, Congressional funding has dried up and there is no indication we will get more federal funding, so while we have had eight years of overall positive budget, this current FY will likely be the first that goes negative because of the unplanned special Elections. Almost everything they do is mandated by State Law. They have very little discretionary spending. For this Fall Election, this budget includes \$181,000 for poll workers. That is \$86,000 for the Primary, \$95,100 for the General Election. His office does not just do Elections. They also do voter registration and since the last major Election, they have processed over 40,000 name, address, information and party changes plus 8,585 address moves within and outside of the City and they will continue to do voter list maintenance in between Elections when they can. Other line items in this budget are calculated based on the actual costs for known expenses including maintenance of their time stamp machine, membership dues for the City and Town Clerks Association of which he serves as Chair of the Elections Committee and he lobbies for Election administration improvement and many of the cost savings that they have realized. They have had National impact and recognition in the last year, they have the No Time to Fail, which is on Amazon Prime and Apple TV, which is showcasing his office on national level. They also have membership in several national boards, including the Federal Election Assistance Commission Standards Board, which he will be attending next week in Kansas City, the Local Leadership Council, which he serves as Chair of the Northeast Region for New England, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and New York in the Bi-Partisan Policy Center Task Force and Elections as well as the Election Center Partnership for Large Election Jurisdictions, Election Verification Network and Election Community Network. He has an incredible staff in his office and combined, there are 68 years of experience in the Canvassing Authority that includes seven for himself, eight for Emerson Brito, 23 years for Maria Madonna and 30 years for Terri Bucci. Their jobs have changed tremendously in the last fifteen years and for the last three years, his office has requested in the budget, but not yet received, job classification changes for their positions, which include a job title change, a refiling their job descriptions to include all the new duties that have been added, such as curating the mail ballot drop box for early voting and more supervisory authority and many other changes, including cyber security that have been added to their duties. Director Lima provided a packet and stated that it includes a letter from the Board of Canvassers that does request the job title changes be made with a corresponding one grade increase. He believes this can be done within the confines of the current departmental Operating Budget of approximately \$4,000 in total.

Director Zidelis stated that in regards to Director Lima's request, he did make it with his original presentation and the Council is the appropriating body, but other departments made very similar requests across the board that were not incorporated in the Mayor's budget. It is the Councils' purview, but he cautioned that other departments that report to the Administration made similar requests and this could have escalating effects. He also stated that Director Lima's estimate for the Elections was a higher amount and he will work with him to get it down to \$225,000. Director Lima stated that he is fully comfortable with that and he thinks they can work within those means particularly given what they spent on Elections in recent years and the cost savings that they have realized. They also have some legislation pending in the General Assembly that may even result in a few thousand more cost savings if it passes before June, which is an unknown, but as Director Zidelis stated, in their case, his office staff is appointed by the Board of Canvassers with Council confirmation. In this case, the Board of Canvassers voted unanimously in December to authorize him to make this ask regarding the two grade changes.

Chair asked Director Lima if, based on the proposed changes, he has the funds he needs to run Elections. Director Lima stated yes.

Revenues

No discussion was held.

ASSESSMENT *Group #1114*

Expenses

Ken Mallette, Tax Assessor, appeared to speak and stated that this department is adequately staffed. They are looking at technology to help them meet their goal both today and in the future so there is a little increase in the departmental expenses of \$11,000. That is going to help enhance their pictometry over eagle view, which is an assessment tool. They hope to add an item to that called change finder and that is going to enable them to better serve the citizens of Cranston and to easily detect when changes are made to properties, be it with permits or without permits. He also stated that all of their expenses are down.

Chair indicated to line item #51104 "Differential" and stated that that was not expended through February. He asked if it is anticipated that that Differential will be necessary for Fiscal Year 2025. Director Mallette stated, yes. When he came to the City of Cranston, they reallocated certain functions of the department to other employees so these are things that were added to that and the Differential helps meet those goals.

Revenues

No discussion was held.

ACCOUNTS & CONTROL *Group #1113*

Mike Igoe, City Controller, appeared to speak.

Chair questioned why "Overtime" is running over. Director Zidelis indicated that the Auditor's Management Letter comments about someone retiring at the end of FY23 and the cascading effects and that position, which was a 35 hour position, workload had to be done on an overtime basis by a person at higher pay so the Overtime expended this year was someone doing the work of that former employee.

We have now hired an employee who is actually in the Finance budget although he is assigned in the Controllers. In terms of Overtime, in FY25, the person should be up and running and thus reduce that need for Overtime. For FY24, the salary that is available in Finance will be transferred over to Accounting to reduce the Overtime.

CONTRACT & PURCHASE Group #1115

Expense

No discussion was held.

Revenues

Chair stated that he assumes that the “Scrap” reduction is due to a sale. Director Zidelis stated that that was Sanders School, which was the FY24. Prospectively, revenue in scrap sales are going to be primarily disposing of vehicles which are not used, our normal course of business until such time we have a larger asset to sell, such as a school.

TREASURY & TAX COLLECTIONS Group #1117

Chair indicated to line item #52016 “Professional Services” and questioned what this is for and why is it the amount that compared to the actuals? Director Zidelis stated that that is generally for the lawyers of Tax Sales if we have to do title search or primarily legal fees. In terms of timing, this is one of those fourth quarter expenses because the tax sale will be in May, but the expenses would be incurred in the final quarter of the Fiscal Year.

Council President Marino indicated to Director Zidelis that last year’s budget we had gone over this relative to departments having their own section, some of them for legal services, and this one stating Professional Services, but essentially, it is legal services and we talked about it being centralized as a better approach. She understands that it would include correlation with Solicitor Millea, but she would impress upon that that should be something that should be examined and her question is all these professional services as identified in this item as #52016, are any of those expenditures of \$448,000, is there any overlap with Solicitor Millea’s department? Director Zidelis stated no and the report Solicitor Millea provides to the Council ties directly to their outside counsel.

FINANCE DEPARTMENT Group #1112

Expense

Chair indicated to line item #51108 “Severance” and asked if there is anything planned. Director Zidelis stated that with exception of Police and Fire, the payout of any accrued time for the rest of the City comes out of Finance.

Councilman Ferri indicated to line item #51407 “Contributions to Claims Risk Management” and questioned decrease of \$90,000. Director Zidelis stated that there are two components going into that. One being reducing the settlement, but if you look at the trend on that, that is also down between the two Fiscal Years so that is a measured risk as a budget reduction this year. Councilman Ferri stated that the actuals in 2022 was \$2,200,000. Director Zidelis stated that he would have to assume that in 2022, we tried to do some settlements. Mr. DiMaio stated that he believes that was the ARPA funds, the \$9 million of additional \$7 million and the additional \$2 million went to claims to cover outstanding claims.

Council Vice-President Vargas indicated to line item #52900 “Bank Charges” and asked Director Zidelis if he anticipates using that remaining balance. Director Zidelis stated that three quarters of the year, we have only used \$360. Right now, does he think we are going to use that next year, he does not know.

Councilman Ferri asked what the balance is in the Contribution to Insurance Risk fund. Director Zidelis stated that he does not have that amount at this time. He will provide that.

Revenues

Chair indicated to line item #49130 and stated that proposal is going up 15,000%, but it is going from \$100 to \$15,000, which seems a little conservative based on the 2024 numbers. He asked Director Zidelis if he feels comfortable if that went up to \$17,500. Director Zidelis stated no, he would not feel uncomfortable.

REVENUES Group #0000

Director Zidelis stated that he does not have information for this item at this time. He must have omitted March year to date when sent out the package revenues #400000.

Council Presidente Marino stated that it is up to the Chair, but her suggestion is this be continued to the next budget meeting so the Council can have a more thorough discussion on it. Chair stated that this is the last budget hearing before amendment night, adoption and veto, so we would have to call a special meeting. We could also piggy back on if there is any other meetings that are potentially called or before another meeting we could hear this. Council President Marino stated that as long as there are no objections, we could discuss it as much as we could this evening and then if there are additional questions that requires additional meeting, we could convene it.

The Committee took a fifteen minute recess.

The Committee reconvened.

Chair stated that in transparency, the conversation was that he believes Municipal Indebtedness and Long-Term Debt was not posted so the initial intent is to have a special meeting before the regularly scheduled April full Council meeting to discuss those two groups ahead of amendment night.

TAXES, STATE AID AND GENERAL REVENUES Group #000000

Council Vice-President Vargas addressed Johnson and Wales and stated that from what she remembers, that was soon to expire, sunset and was supposed to be continued conversation. She asked if this happened and why is that number lower than what it was? Director Zidelis stated that there were conversations with Johnson and Wales. It ceased, but they said that they would be amenable to a pilot payment. Four or five months ago, they sold, but they still have properties, but the lion share of the pilot payment properties have been sold so we have to rearrange with the Finance Director. The estimate is half of what it was before, but there will be a pilot payment from Johnson and Wales.

Council President Marino asked where “Rescue” is currently tracking. Director Zidelis stated to Council President Marino that if she is referring to the Rescue line item, 24 Budget was \$3 million and FY25 projection is \$3.6 million. With third party rescue is an aggressive collection, there is a timing a receivable that we have on the books so the increase in the Medicaid fee compiled with collecting the receivables that are on the books is why we are projecting an increase in revenues in that line item.

Chair indicated to line item #41520 “Restaurant Tax” and questioned projection for this going up 12%. Director Zidelis stated that the biggest driver on that is TopGolf. Chair stated that his concern is the Governor has 2.85 and this is 3. Director Zidelis stated that we know they are collecting those revenues, which eventually will flow into us.

Mr. DiMaio stated that currently, at the State House, there is discussion from one of the Representatives of a sunset phase-out of the Meals Tax, a quarter of a point a year starting January 1, 2025 through January 1, 2029. We do not know if it is going to pass or not, but it is something that we should be monitoring.

Chair indicated to line item #41522 “Third Party Rescue” and stated that through February, it was annualized at approximately 2.9, which is on par with the previous five year average of approximately 2.9. He questioned why the increase by \$600,000. Director Zidelis stated that as he previously stated, there is Medicaid increase, there is increased reimbursements coming through that went into effect January. We expect to have a higher rate coming back and receivables collections.

Councilwoman Renzulli asked what makes the Pilot go up or down. Director Zidelis stated that the use of the property, there were certain usage that, by Statute, they reimburse for the change. That would decrease or increase the Pilot. Councilwoman Renzulli asked if the vacant State buildings that are on City of Cranston property, earn us no money because the State is not using them. Director Zidelis stated that it is the use of the building that dictate the reimbursement so if they are not using the building they are not paying reimbursement by State Law. Councilwoman Renzulli asked if there is room to negotiate Pilot with the State based on value of the property. Director Zidelis stated that for uses that are not eligible for reimbursement, no, we cannot do it, but their payment goes by if that value increases, he thinks payment does.

Councilman Ferri indicated to line item #49135 “COVID 19 Stimulus” and stated that in 2021 we used \$15 million, in 2022 we used \$7.8 million, in 2023 we used \$19.4 million and 2024 we used \$4.8 million. He asked if that is correct. Director Zidelis stated that in 2021 he was not with the City, but he believes the \$15 million may have been ARPA and he believes the CARES Act, but he can check into that and report back.

Chair asked how much is left in the COVID Stimulus. Director Zidelis stated \$5 million plus interest.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY Group #1116

Expense

Chair indicated to line item #52016 “Professional Services” and questioned what this is for. Director Zidelis stated that it is not legal fees. This is for our third party to provide certain technical support to help us manage our Network and our overall system. Chair asked if the \$104,000 is a set contract. Director Zidelis stated that that is a manage servicing contract that we renew every year.

Chair indicated to line item #52931 “Computer Maintenance and Fees” and questioned the increase. Director Zidelis stated that this is numerous fees associated with our Network that we currently have in place. This encompasses all our web hosting and cybersecurity. It is our existing maintenance costs for all of our software throughout the City. Chair asked what those \$30,000 increase in expenses are. Director Zidelis stated that this is just the financial system for going up to \$5,000 and that is just one application. Also, the patch support on our cybersecurity is going up \$3,000. He can provide a list of the increases for FY24 to FY25.

Revenues

No discussion.

CITY CLERK Group #1105

Tracy Nelson, City Clerk, appeared to speak and thanked the Council in particular for the allocation of ARPA funds last year to get some software for the Clerk's Office. As to the status on that, we went live on April 1st with a cash receipt system and the ability to retire our 1988 cash register. Director Zidelis was incremental in that process and the system is running well. It allows for a better audit trail, it allows for better calculation and better tracking of the money coming into the Office. We have also started with Clerkbases, which is going to host our Ordinances and Resolutions going back to 2002 and some minutes going back to, she believes, 2020 or further. The Ordinances and Resolutions will be linked and posted to our City website and that will make all those Ordinances, Resolutions and minutes searchable by key words and the general public will have access to that. That should be going live in the near future. Other system that we have procured is Onboard, that is the boards and commissions database and that is a work in progress. Probate, she expects to go to BOCAP next month. This is going to be a three part phase. The first part is going to be getting a software management program. Other part is addressing all the prior 30,000 estates that are not backed up anywhere, which are permanent records and at this time they are being stored in cardboard boxes on top of shelves in the vault that does not have a fire door and they are stored directly beneath sprinkler heads. Business license software, we will be going with Opengov, which is who Inspections has for their permitting. We intend to have that portal up and working by the end of August so that all the Liquor and Victualling renewals can be done through that portal. She appreciates the funding for that. Some of the continuing costs for that software and in FY25 in the Operating Budget there is \$9,242 in Departmental Expenses, which is for business licensing. Business licenses are not permanent records so we can't use historical records funds. What we will be using for historical records is \$7,510 to maintain Clerkbases, \$1,800 to maintain the boards and commissions and approximately \$4,800 for next year for Probate. Other amounts taken out of that historical records are \$67,000 for our continuing offsite storage of microfilm from Iron Mountain.

Ms. Nelson stated that she has two line items she would like to address because they are significantly different from the department request. The first is line item #51101 Overtime. The trends FY22, the actual was \$17,698, FY23 actual was \$18,952. During that Fiscal Year is when she was hired and was new, we budgeted for \$15,000. Her department request for this year was \$10,000 originally. When she met with Director Zidelis they had come to an agreement on \$7,500, however, the Mayor has only budgeted \$5,000. We are currently at \$3,776.85, which does not include the current payroll, the bulk of these budget hearings, we will have Inauguration in FY25, so she is respectfully requesting that the Council consider increasing that from \$5,000 back up to the \$7,500 that Director Zidelis and she had discussed. The other item is line item #51203 Clerical Assistance. The trend for FY22 actual was \$45,305, for FY23 actual was \$34,512, FY24 was a budget of \$30,000. We are currently at 83%. That line item is going to go over budget. Her original department request was for \$42,482. That represents an increase in hourly rate of pay for one of the part-time clerks, who has been very instrumental in helping her get these new programs up and running. She has taken the lead on the cash receipts program, she is going to be the one building the licensing software. She is hourly employee, she gets no benefits. She is doing comparative work as the other full-time clerks so in order to minimize that gap between her and her co-workers she is asking for fifty cents an hour raise for her. The other portion of that is to increase her from 21 hours to 25 hours a week beginning in September. It is only an increase of four hours a week, fifty cents an hour. The Mayor has put in \$35,000, that is not sufficient if she kept the two part-time employees at their current hourly rate and their current hours, that would be \$37,193.

Council President Marino thanked Ms. Nelson and stated that her services and her lead as City Clerk has been a welcome and very much appreciated. We understand the real hard task in terms of updating of where we should have been years ago and where we need to get with the software updates, the closing of the cash only cash register services and we look forward to the other technological improvements and particularly using the historical records fees for the purposes of which they are designated to facilitate those improvements at no additional costs to the taxpayer. Upgrade to the Municipal Code, is that incorporated at all in this budget? Ms. Nelson stated that it is not incorporated in her budget. It was a department request for the City Council, but it is not represented in the Mayor's budget, it was not allocated. Council President Marino asked Director Zidelis if that would be a cost under the Clerk's budget. Director Zidelis stated that it was incorporated in one of the requests in the City Council budget and did not make it through the final budget recommendation.

Councilman Ferri thanked Ms. Nelson for the progress she is making to improve the technology in the Clerk's Office. It is a path we need to stay on, we need to be diligent about it and if more money is needed, let the Council know because we want this to continue throughout City Hall, not just the Clerk's Office because it is 2024 and we need to act that way.

Councilwoman Renzulli thanked Ms. Nelson for all the work she has done and is doing. As to the Overtime, she asked if the \$7,500 would be enough, because as an example, \$5,000 was allocated to Planning and they have a lot less meetings to attend than Rosalba, who attends the Council sub-committees. She is just wondering if this is anticipating having long meetings, short meetings. She wants to make sure that it is in line with what is actually needed. Ms. Nelson stated that this is why she did the conservative approach of the \$10,000. She thinks \$7,500 is more in her comfort zone, \$5,000 she is not comfortable with.

Revenues

Ms. Nelson pointed out that she noticed that the amounts for line item #42121 "Sunday Sales License" and line item #42137 "Auto Repair License" and line item #42125 "Dog Licenses" and those numbers have jumped up quite a bit. She is concerned that those revenues are being over projected. She did not calculate those, Director Zidelis did. She asked for Director Zidelis to confirm that those numbers are on track with what we are looking at. Director Zidelis stated that he will have to report back on those. Ms. Nelson stated that line item #42138 "Tobacco License" has been budgeted at \$11,500 and that should actually be zeroed out because, by law, we are no longer issuing those licenses. Chair stated that if that is the case, that \$11,500 needs to be found somewhere by the Administration.

Councilwoman Renzulli stated that Dog Licenses through March is running high. Ms. Nelson stated that she believes that those fees have been calculated differently than in previous years. There are two RI required assessments that are to be collected on each dog and she believes we were only collecting one or we were not collecting the correct amount so that has been adjusted. Those fees are also supposed to be on top of whatever our dog license fee is so our current dog licenses instead of being ten and seven are thirteen and ten. She thinks that is why it should go up some, but she is concerned about it going up double.

Councilwoman Renzulli asked if we are capturing the amount of dogs that we think are in the City that are actually licensed because when she mentions dog license to people she knows have dogs, they have no idea what she is talking about. Councilman Ferri stated that he spoke to Animal Control Officer at one time and she stated to him that she estimates that one quarter of the dogs in the City have a license. Ms. Nelson stated that some of the people that do go into the Office to license their dog state

that they did not know they had to license their dog. Maybe there is some type of educational community component we could put in there that could increase those fees. Right now, part of our business licensing software, we will have our dog licensing through that software for next year's renewals so people will be able to renew online. She cannot say at this time exactly how many dogs we have licensed because of the way our system works. With the new system, we will be able to prepare a report that will show exactly how many licensed dogs we do have. Councilman Ferri asked if the Animal Control Department receives a certain amount of that fee. Ms. Nelson stated that for every license, \$3 goes into separate funds. One is a low cost spay and neuter fund and the other one is supposed to be set aside for enforcement. Councilwoman Renzulli stated that not just dog license, but other licenses, she asked if we actually fine anyone for not getting a license or renewing their license on time or not having a license at all and if there is a License Inspector or one in the past even on a part-time basis. Ms. Nelson stated that there is no such thing as a License Inspector in the City. Only way we collect any fines is by sending them a summons for Municipal Court and there has been in many instances either through the RI General Laws or the Code of Ordinances, there are fines that can be assessed or violations that can be assessed. The problem is that requires legal action and that is beyond her. She can submit to the Municipal Court a summons, but from there, it is in Legals' hands and that also needs to be initiated by either the Committee or by the Solicitor.

Solicitor Marsella stated that if there is a violation by the dog or its owner, they will issue a violation and if the dog is not licensed, they will go through Municipal Court and there is a statutory fine associated with that.

Councilwoman Renzulli stated that beyond dogs, when people do not renew their business license or liquor license on time, do we actually fine them? Is there any accountability? Solicitor Marsella stated that liquor license is a little different, but they will issue a Cease and Desist depending in Superior Court and fines and jail time, but that goes into more comprehensive enforcement with liquor licenses, but there would certainly be fines for not registering the business. Those fines go to DBR, they do not have anything to do with the City at that point.

PROBATE Group #1106

Ms. Nelson appeared to speak and stated this is pretty much cut and dry. It is level-funded it is basically the salary for the Probate Judge.

CITY COUNCIL

No discussion.

SEWER ENTERPRISE FUND

Director Zidelis stated that in terms of the Sewer Enterprise Fund, it does not affect the tax budget because it is an Enterprise.

Council President Marino stated that all the money in that fund stays in that fund. She asked if that is correct. Director Zidelis stated that that is correct.

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Chair stated that these are entirely level-funded.

Director Zidelis stated that "Audit of City Books" is out for an RFP so this anticipates an increase over the current year.

Councilman Paplauskas stated that the actual on Video Streaming is low. We are still getting a lot of feedback from the sound system and it has been going on for years. He is not advocating spending any City dollars, but if we have some money left over in the budget, maybe look into changing the amps. Councilman Ferri agreed looking into whatever it is going to cost to make this system at least a little better.

CRANSTON COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM (CCAP) Group #1900

Chair indicated to line item #52054 “Cranston Community Grants – Rental Assistance” and stated that he reached out to Director Joanne McGunagle about this line item. He stated that this line item had \$10,000. We had put in as a Council in 2019 for the 2020 budget and it was used for those first two years, but it has not been used in 2022, 2023 and to date, it has not been used in 2024 yet. He asked if that money can be moved into another community program to benefit people in the City that could use some help. Director McGunagle stated to him that they were not aware that the money was still available. They will reach out and that they would like to see that money kept for that program.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Group #1110

Chair indicated to the “Marketing” line item and questioned why it is going down \$11,000. He stated that that line item was budget for a partnership with the Providence Warwick Visitors Convention and Visitors Bureau with the department. That was going to be a two year agreement and he questioned if we are not going to move forward with year two. Director Zidelis stated that nothing has been spent to date. He does not know if that has been executed. Chair stated that the agreement was definitely executed and he knows because he was the one who spearheaded it. This is an opportunity to work with a group that does significant scheduling of events here in the State and he thinks that the City could benefit from it and he also thinks that the City could benefit from it if we took advantage of what they are offering. He is not sure that we are getting the most out of that right now. This was a different year for the Director because of personnel reasons and he would like to check with the Director on the activity.

Councilman Ferri stated that there used to be a full-time Assistant in that office. Is that position completely eliminated now? Director Zidelis stated that it is in the Salary Schedule but not funded. Councilman Ferri asked if the Director requested that that be funded. Director Zidelis stated that it was not funded in 2024 and the Administration did not add any new positions in this year’s budget. Councilman Ferri asked if someone is getting a stipend to assist the Director. Director Zidelis stated that there is Differential and he is being assisted from an individual in the Mayor’s Office, he believes the Communications Director. Councilman Ferri asked what that Differential is. Director Zidelis apologized and stated that he does not see any Differential being paid. Council President Marino asked that Attorney Angell, Solicitor Marsella or Mr. DiMaio speak to the fact that if Differential is being paid, if we as a Council do not appropriate the funds for that Differential, she does not believe Differential can occur if it is not budgeted? Director Zidelis stated that in looking at the reports, he does not see Differential being paid out. Councilman Ferri stated that it was brought up in the past that there was Differential being paid to the Communications Director to assist the Economic Development Director in that Office. Attorney Angell stated that if it is a contractual situation where wages are paid under a collective bargaining agreement or by some other private contractive employment, it has to be funded. If it is not in the budget, then you have not appropriated for it. Factually, he thinks the Council has to know how this person is getting paid and appropriate accordingly. Councilman Ferri asked that this be looked into and if it is happening, we need to correct how it is being done and needs to be put in the budget.

EXECUTIVE Group #1101

Chair indicated to the “Orders of the Mayor” line item and questioned the increase of \$4,500. Director Zidelis stated that that line item and “Public Observances and Holidays” are going down, it is a reclassification of funds of those two line items.

Council President Marino questioned the proposed increase of \$8,000 in “Salaries” in aggregate for the Executive Branch. Director Zidelis stated that that is the Admin positions. That has run throughout all the departments. Chair asked Director Zidelis to provide schedule of how the \$8,000 will be allocated and to whom it is being allocated for next year.

PERSONNEL Group #1104

Council President Marino stated that there is a \$3,200 proposed increase in Salary. She asked if this is the same as Group #1101. Director Zidelis stated that that is correct.

INSURANCE CLAIMS & RISK MANAGEMENT

No discussion.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees